



**FIGHTING FOR  
HARD-WORKING  
AMERICANS**



**109<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

**THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER  
SENIOR DEMOCRATIC MEMBER  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE  
WORKFORCE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**2006**

## **We Support Strong Benefits and Protections for Workers**

- ✓ ***Strengthening National Labor Laws***
- ✓ ***Demanding an Increase in the Federal Minimum Wage***
- ✓ ***Protecting Davis-Bacon Wages***
- ✓ ***Securing Workers' Retirement***
- ✓ ***Providing Oversight of the Mine Safety Agency***
- ✓ ***Supporting Fair Trade***



**Left:** Cong. George Miller explains bill introduced to Committee.



- ✓ ***Working for Affordable and Accessible Health Insurance***
- ✓ ***Giving Hard-Working Americans a Direct Voice Through E-Hearings***
- ✓ ***Making Our Economy Work for All Americans***
- ✓ ***Opposing Education and Job Training Funding Cuts***
- ✓ ***Investing in Technology Innovation and Education***

## ***Introduction***

Democrats are working to change America by fighting to protect retirement and health benefits, strengthen our nation's labor laws and ensure fair wages and benefits in an era of runaway executive pay and perks. We are calling for bold, new investments in education and innovative technologies to help keep America number one in global competition.

We recently initiated the nation's first Congressional e-forum. These e-forums have already opened the doors of Congress to thousands of employees of United Airlines, General Motors and Delphi Corporation who have been severely impacted by benefit rollbacks and job losses. The powerful voices of these hard-working Americans about the economic future of their families and communities been ignored for too long.

*Democrats Launch  
First Ever  
E-Forum to Bring  
Worker Voices to  
Congress...*



## ***Strengthening Our Nation's Labor Laws***

Democrats believe that protecting a worker's right to organize is not just morally necessary but vital to a sound economy. Today, however, organizing rights are under severe attack. So far this year, 15,000 workers have been fired or punished at work for supporting a union.

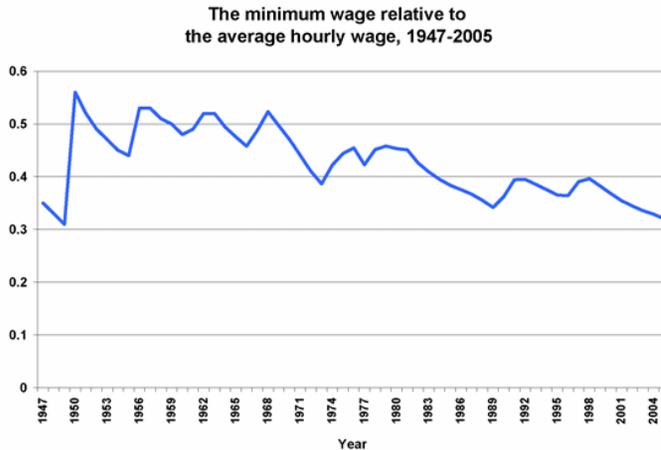
To strengthen America's labor laws and ensure every worker's right to organize, Rep. George Miller (D-CA), joined by Rep. Peter King (R-NY) and some 200 co-sponsors, has introduced the **Employee Free Choice Act**. This bill would require that when a majority of workers say they want a union by signing union cards they get a union. The Employee Free Choice Act would also:



- ✓ Increase penalties on employers who violate workers' rights so that employers cannot treat labor law violations as just another cost of doing business; and
- ✓ Provide for mediated and arbitrated first contracts to ensure that the collective bargaining process is meaningful and in good faith.

## ***Working to Increase the Federal Minimum Wage***

For the past 10 years, while the minimum wage has stagnated, Republican-controlled Congress has approved hundreds of billions of dollars in tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans. As a result, the federal minimum wage is at a 56-year low relative to the average wage. Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, almost \$2,000 under the poverty level. That's why Rep. George Miller and his Democratic colleagues introduced the **Fair Minimum Wage Act** to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour over 26 months. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty. In March, Democrats began an effort to discharge the minimum wage bill from committee and demand a floor vote on the measure.



Source: Economic Policy Institute

## ***Securing Workers' Retirement***

The recent termination of pension plans at United Airlines, which imposed sudden and dramatic cuts to the hard-earned pensions of 120,000 employees and retirees, has illustrated just how insecure the country's private pension system has become.

Some companies are exploiting the pension and bankruptcy laws as part of their business plans to dump their pension obligations onto the federal government, while employees lose billions in vested pension benefits. This is a national tragedy that the administration is not addressing.

Thus far, Congress has failed to enact adequate legislation to protect the pension plans of millions of workers. At a time when workers in the automobile and airline industries face layoffs and reduced pension benefits, there is an urgent need to act.

Democrats are fighting for pension reform legislation that would stop companies from breaking their promises to employees and stop executives who terminate pension plans from turning around and giving themselves lucrative retirement buyouts.



## **Opposing the Administration's Suspension of Davis-Bacon Wages**

In September 2005, President Bush issued a proclamation suspending the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act for workers in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. Congressman Miller – joined by every single Democratic lawmaker in the House – introduced legislation to reverse the proclamation. Despite having a clear majority in the House to reverse the President's measure, no action was taken on the bill.

*"By any standard of human decency, condemning many already poor and now bereft people to subpar wages...is unacceptable. It is also bad for the economy. Without the law, called the Davis-Bacon Act, contractors will be able to pay less, but they'll also get less, as lower wages invariably mean lower productivity."*

*-- Editorial  
The New York Times  
September 10, 2005*

In response, Congressman Miller introduced a Joint Resolution under the 1976 National Emergencies Act, which provides for fast track action by Congress when the President unilaterally

suspends a law, such as Davis-Bacon. Although the National Emergencies Act is nearly 30 years old, this was the first time that a lawmaker had ever invoked its fast track procedures. This maneuver required a House floor vote, despite the objections of the Republican leadership.

Facing a certain loss on Davis-Bacon just before the scheduled House floor vote, President Bush withdrew his proclamation and Davis-Bacon protections were restored.

*"It's a national tragedy to cut the wages of hard-working Americans helping to rebuild roads, bridges, schools and hospitals. The prevailing wages along the Gulf Coast were already among the lowest in the country. How does anyone think that \$11.01 per hour is too much to pay a dump truck driver in New Orleans or that \$7.45 an hour is too much to pay a pipe layer in Mississippi? It is amazing that some see no problem with awarding billion-dollar no-bid contracts to favored companies, but think that local workers in the Gulf struggling to get back on their feet after Katrina are being overpaid."*

*-- Congressman George Miller  
September 2005*



## ***Providing Oversight of the Administration's Mine Safety Agency***

In the wake of the tragedies at the Sago and Aracoma Alma coal mines, the track record of the Department of Labor in protecting the health and safety of tens of thousands of hard-working American miners was exhaustively documented by House Education and the Workforce Democrats in a comprehensive January 31, 2006 report. Among the findings:

- ✓ The administration has filled the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and the Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission (FMSHRC) with mining industry executives.
- ✓ The administration has sought budget cuts and staff reductions at the enforcement agency.
- ✓ It has repealed or withdrawn proposed safety and health regulations, while implementing industry-favored changes.

*" ...it's ridiculous that I can get a computer and I can make a full Web site in an hour and have it up and running so the whole world can see it, but no one can find my dad or no one can track these men."*

*-- Amber Helms, daughter of Terry Helms, a miner who was killed in the Sago Mine tragedy*

- ✓ It has significantly reduced the amount of major fines for mine safety and health violations, compared with the previous administration.
- ✓ The agency has failed to ensure that the industry keeps pace with existing mine safety technologies, such as electronic tracking and communication devices and reserve oxygen chambers that could have saved lives at the Sago and Aracoma Alma mines.

Democrats are working to restore agency funding, reverse regulatory safety and health rollbacks, require the agency to drop its 'voluntary compliance' mentality and require mines to keep pace with safety technologies and comply with standby rescue team requirements.



**Freda Sorah, wife of Joe Sorah, testifies in February at our mine safety forum about her husband's death in a 2001 mining tragedy.**

## **Tackling Skyrocketing Health Care Costs and Millions of Uninsured**

For the past five years, health care costs have increased by nearly 60 percent, burdening hard-working families with added costs not covered by increases in earnings and driving up the number of uninsured to a staggering 45.8 million Americans, including 8.4 million children.

Yet, Republicans in Congress have responded to the health care crisis by passing legislation to benefit HMOs and insurance companies – legislation that will do nothing to lower health care costs for working families or reduce the number of uninsured, and in some instances will actually *increase* costs. At the same time, they continue to reduce funding for Medicaid by billions of dollars.

Democrats believe all Americans should have access to affordable, quality health care. Rep. Pete Stark has introduced legislation to expand access to Medicaid and SCHIP for under-served populations. Representatives John Barrow, Ron Kind, and Rob Andrews introduced legislation to provide small business owners with tax incentives to offer affordable health coverage to employees through qualified health insurance pooling arrangements. Representative John Conyers, Jr. has introduced legislation to create a publicly-financed, privately-administered single payer health care program that uses the already existing Medicare program.

## **Our Online E-Forums Give Hard-Working Americans a Direct Voice in Congress**

*“My husband retired two years ago and he also worked for General Motors... my job, wages, benefits and retirement are my life, please don't take that away from me, not now this late in my life.”*

*-- Mary Lloyd  
Watauga, Texas*

For too long, the concerns of hard-working families have been ignored in Washington, D.C.

In response, House Education and Workforce Democrats launched the nation's

first e-forum last year to investigate United Airlines' decision to dump its pension promises onto the federal government – a maneuver by the company that cost United employees and retirees billions of dollars in vested pension benefits. More than 2,000 United employees participated – many with heartbreaking personal stories.

In January 2006, thousands of workers and retirees at GM and Delphi participated in another e-forum sponsored by Committee Democrats to make the Committee aware of their opposition to announced job cuts and assaults on pension and health care benefits.

*“I can't help but to ask myself at what point are companies allowed to take away so much from the lives of dedicated employees and their families? At what point does our Government step in and stop atrocities such as this before they are allowed to irrevocably change the lives of so many?”*

*-- Ellen Saracini, wife of Captain J. Victor Saracini, who was piloting one of the planes that was crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11*

## ***Making Our Economy Work For All Americans***

Our nation faces record federal budget and trade deficits, rising poverty rates, rising health care costs, rising gasoline and heating oil prices, rising college tuition, and skyrocketing household debt. At the same time, family incomes are falling, saving rates have plummeted to the lowest level since the Great Depression and health and pension coverage is falling.

In response to this dramatic reversal in the nation's economy, Democrats are fighting to return to the Clinton era of budget surpluses, strengthen workers' right to organize the workplace, invest in colleges and neighborhood schools, preserve health and pension benefits, provide for a fair minimum wage, insist on fair trade policies and invest in new technologies.

### ***Fighting for Fair Trade Policies***

The Bush administration continues to promote international trade agreements that have resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of American jobs to unfair foreign competition. America needs tough enforcement of international labor standards on worker wages, safety, discrimination, and collective bargaining. Democrats are promoting fair trade policies that will put American workers first and improve workplace conditions and labor rights overseas.

## ***Calling for New Investments in Education and Passage of the Innovation Agenda***

Democrats are calling for an increase in the maximum Pell grant to the \$5,100 level promised by President Bush back in 2000 (the maximum Pell grant is \$4,050), a cut in the interest rate student borrowers pay to attend college and to make tuition payments tax deductible. We want to fully fund the No Child Left behind Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and we have introduced a strong proposal to recruit and retain outstanding teachers.

House Democrats have proposed the **Innovation Agenda** to ensure that America keeps its global leadership in technological advancement. It proposes to create a skilled workforce in vital areas of science, math, engineering and information technology, achieve energy independence in 10 years by developing emerging technologies for clean and sustainable alternatives and invest in scientific research that provides the foundation for innovation and future technologies.



*A Commitment to Competitiveness  
To Keep America #1*

## ***Opposing Education and Job Training Budget Cuts***

The FY 2007 Bush administration budget proposes the biggest cuts to education funding in ten years. It cuts education funding by \$2.1 billion, or 3.8 percent below last year, despite rising college costs and increased requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. This is on top of a \$12 billion dollar cut to student loan programs signed by President Bush in February, the single largest cut to federal student aid in history. Here is a brief highlight of these education and job training cuts:

- ✓ Freezes the maximum Pell grant award to \$4,050, while average tuition and fees have risen by \$1,400.
- ✓ Denies extra academic help to 3.7 million disadvantaged school children, breaking funding promises and undermining efforts to close the achievement gap.
- ✓ Eliminates funding for all vocational education, destroying innovative career education programs for high school and community colleges.
- ✓ Cuts job training funds by \$500 million, and converts job training programs into voucher accounts.
- ✓ Freezes funding for after-school programs, and eliminates student safety and drug abuse prevention programs.

## ***About Representative George Miller Senior Democratic Member Committee on Education and the Workforce***

Congressman George Miller is a leading spokesman in Congress on education, labor, the economy and the environment. He has represented the 7th District of California in San Francisco's East Bay since 1975. His district includes portions of Contra Costa and Solano counties, including Richmond, Concord, Martinez, Pittsburg, Vallejo, Benicia and Vacaville.

Miller plays a leadership role in the House of Representatives developing policies, strategy, and communications on a wide range of issues. He has been the ranking Democrat on the Committee on Education and the Workforce since 2001.

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